

Conference Paper

Humor As a Means of Manipulating a Social Group's Opinion in Modern Online Communities (A Case-Study on 'the Houses of' 2ch and Pikabu)

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Abstract

The Internet is a communication space where newly formed communities search for ways to reflect on their social nature. We provide a theoretical background to demonstrate how the humor was used to manipulate social groups before the rise of mass media and after it. We use Critical Discourse Analysis and pragmatics to study several cases of social manipulation with the help of humor. The two Internet communities, 2ch and Pikabu, being among the largest Russian-speaking entertainment communities, often compete and use humor as a way to manipulate their representatives for social purposes: to consolidate, fight back, reflect on their community's norms and values. Our research shows that these communities follow the old traditions of humor and laughter to organize the poorly regulated information space. Although 2chers tend to use trolling more often, there are no general differences between these communities in how they use humor to manipulate their social group.

Keywords: Humor, laughter, Internet, social cognition, Critical Discourse Analysis, pragmatics, speech act

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1. Introduction

The opening scene of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* depicts a fight between servants of the two houses, Montague and Capulet. The fight is preceded by mockery, as many other fights in the play and outside it. Historically, representatives of the rivaling communities mock each other following long ago established cultural rituals. But what do they do if they cannot physically access any of the competitors to start a fight? And what if representatives of the two sides are fully anonymized? The Internet is a communication space where 'feuding houses' have to reconsider the old rituals under these new conditions. The current research studies how two Russian-speaking Internet communities, 2ch and Pikabu, use humor to reflect on their social group. We use Critical Discourse Analysis and pragmatics to investigate how each group's representatives try

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to manipulate their group's opinion, support their group's beliefs (or challenge them) and protect norms of the community.

It is important that due to the agonistic nature of humor (discussed further) we compare two 'competing' communities. For this purpose we chose 2ch and Pikabu. 2ch is an abbreviation of '2 channel' (<https://2ch.hk/>). It is a Russian analogue of 4ch, an image board and anonymous web forum. Owing to its anonymity, this Internet community tends to openly express verbal aggression, pushing the limits to extremes. Pikabu (<https://pikabu.ru>) takes after another popular resource, Reddit, and also has much in common with 9gag. Unlike 2ch, it requires registration and has stricter rules for aggressive content. The two communities produce predominantly humorous and entertaining content, are among the largest Internet Russian-speaking communities and sometimes openly express their negative attitude towards each other.

In our analysis, we are going to use the following basic terminology. Considering our research of [1], we treat 'humor' most generally as anything that refers to comedy and laughter: any genre of comedy, i.e. a speech act, speech genre, folklore, art genre etc.; a process of its realization as a work of art, actual jest, joke; a reaction of the audience, such as laughter or a smile or even a mere recognition of ridicule. We understand 'manipulation' as an indirect influence on its object (a person, group, institution or even a social process or phenomenon like humor) with the aim to change its properties or course of action. In connection with humor, on the one hand, manipulation can be a way to ridicule a person, lower (or vice versa upgrade) their social status, etc. On the other hand, it is a way to suppress humor in certain spheres of human activity. By a 'community' (in the current research, we will consider this term a synonym to a 'social group'), we mean a collection of individuals that interact in a certain way based on the shared expectations of the group's representatives towards each other [2, 262].

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We start our research with a brief review of how analytical thought treated connection between humor and manipulation throughout the history of mankind. Then, we consider how the traditions are transformed and adapted with the rise of digital technologies. We proceed with the description of the applied methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and pragmatics and analyze communicative practices of the two Internet communities, 2ch and Pikabu, based on a collection of texts (posts and comments) from their sites. We conclude about the social grounds and communicative nature of humor in the studied texts.

2. Humor and Manipulation Before the Mass Media

Classical Greek philosophers: Plato in Φίληβος and Πολιτεία, Aristotle in Περί ποιητικῆς (*Poetics*), and their Roman successors: Cicero in *De Oratore*, Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* and others, discussed the essence of humor underlining its power to abuse. In Book II, Chapter 58 of *De Oratore*, Cicero questions whether 'it becomes the orator to wish to excite the laughter' [3, 150]. His major concern is the appropriateness of humor in court where it is universally suppressed until today.

In the surviving part of *Poetics*, Aristotle dwells upon the opposition of comic and tragic, calling Comedy 'an imitation of characters of a lower type' [4, 20]. It may appear that he limits humor to a folklore tradition and use (thus, opposing it to the civilized world). However, the believed to be the second part of *Poetics*, *Tractatus Coislinianus*, first, balances this opposition and, second, outlines the two vectors: the Old comedy as a more abusive type, close to iambic invective in the style of Archilochus and Hipponax, and the New comedy that has 'a deeper meaning than his (the author's) words, taken literally, suggest' [5, 259]. The second type refers to the late comedy by Aristophanes (e.g., *The Clouds*) and his successors. It 'disregards laughter, and tends toward the serious' [5, 285]; it is more of a satire uncovering public vices. The New comedy leads us to another important concept: a laughing wise man. The famous comparison of Democritus of Abdera as a constantly laughing wise man to Heraclitus of Ephesus, who weeps unceasingly [6], emphasizes the ability of humor to raise one above the society and release the tension of taking life too seriously. Describing the Chinese tradition of humor studies and the philosophy of a Chinese thinker Lü Kunn 呂坤 (1536-1618), Paolo Santangelo calls such laughter 'a sign of non-conformist behaviour, or of a deeper wisdom' [6, 7]. In Buddhist tradition, the smile on Buddha's face denotes serenity and victory over desires [8]. In some Daoist texts, the authors advise against laughing too much stating that laughter can damage kidneys and hips [9, 339]. If a hard laugh is linked to mockery, a wise man's laughter should be, on the opposite, characterized by a sort of lightness, detachment and solitude.

Concerning the Old comedy, in Part III of *Poetics*, Aristotle mentions that the Dorians (an ἔθνος of Classical Greece) assign the origin of the word 'comedy' to the phrase κατά κῶμας 'wondering from village to village' [4, 15] where the second word denotes 'the most primitive and ancient form of settlement' [10, 78]. The archaic abusive people's (or carnival, tribal) humor became the subject of elaborate studies in the twentieth century.

In her doctoral dissertation *The Poetics of Plot and Genre* (1936) [11], Olga Freidenberg suggests that the key folklore opposition of life and death is bound to laughter and

crying. Laughter is an inherent part of invective rituals. On the one hand, there are competitions in court that do not allow laughter. On the other hand, there are verbal rituals (e.g., during feasts) where the two competitors ridicule and blame each other of different vices: 'the pre-Islamic bragging and slanging, the Old Norse *mannjafnaðr* and the Icelandic *nidsang* (hymn of hate), as well as the ancient Chinese contests' [12, 86]. Elena Gurevich observes such elements of *senna* (a ritual of verbal confrontation) and *mannjafnaðr* as blaming of disgraceful behavior, swearing, exaggerating and feigning contestants' fault [13].

In the first part of his *Mythologiques, The Raw and the Cooked*, (1964), Claude Levi-Strauss renders some Indian, Bolivian and Brazil myths that forbid laughing under the penalty of death. One of the legends tells that 'the Indian warrior despises laughter and tickling, which are barely suitable even for women and children' [14, 122]. However, Levi-Strauss mentions another kind of laughter that binds it with the origin of cooking fire: 'the triumphant laughter marking cultural invention' [14, 132]. William Martineau in *A Model of the Social Functions of Humor* [15] describes a sociologist's approach to humor. It is considered as a means to increase solidarity of an in-group and demoralize the out-group; it releases tension that is accumulated because of the cultural restrictions and helps to overcome the fear of failure and the nature.

Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1965) [16] writes about the carnival laughter. In 1966, Julia Kristeva develops his thought in the article *Le mot, le dialogue et le roman* (*Word, Dialogue and Novel*) (written in 1967, published in ΣΗΜΕΙΩΤΙΚΗ: *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*) introducing the concept of Mennipean novel (Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift, Marquis de Sade, Balzac, Lautréamont, Dostoevsky, Joyce, Kafka): 'Its history is the history of the struggle against Christianity and its representation; this means an exploration of language (of sexuality and death), a consecration of ambivalence and of "vice"' [17, 50].

In sum, although cultures generally suppress humor in institutions like court, government, and church, and forbid straight-out laughter and mockery, there are two kinds of humor that are universally allowable. The abusive folklore-related humor is limited to ritual use and special genres: carnival, feasts, verbal contests, etc. Its essence is triumph over the nature (for crowded events) and a weaker rival (for one-on-one contests). The second type is humor of wise men, gods, artists and writers, etc. who stand above the everyday life. In this case, humor serves as a tool to uncover the essence of commonplace phenomena and reconcile with their imperfection.

3. How Humor in the Mass Media Manipulates the Audience

When technologies like radio and television emerged, many genres of humor were adopted for recording and broadcasting. For example, stand-up comedy that, as R. Stebbins believes, takes root in prologues of ancient Greek dramas [18], sprang up on the radio with shows by Jack Benny, Fred Allen, George Burns and Gracie Allen. Their shows are enlisted among the most popular by H.M. Beville Jr. (the Research Manager of the National Broadcasting Company, USA) in his *ABCD of Radio Audience* (1940) [19]. M.T. McFadden argues that the two reasons for the success of Jack Benny's show were reflection on 'social context by representing anxieties that were widespread in depression America' and 'offering temporary ideological resolutions of many of those social anxieties' [20, 113]. Also, as L. Mintz puts it, stand-up comedians are 'unsupported by very much in the way of costume, prop, setting, or dramatic vehicle' [21, 193], that is, it is just the speaker, his or her speech and the audience. From this perspective, stand-up comedy is a wise man's humor inheriting its traditional use of reconciliation. Not surprisingly, it can be broadcasted on the national radio channel.

Concerning television, D. Marc states that the situational comedy and variety show are two forms that dominate on TV [22, 11]. He calls both approximations of the theater. For example, 'the sitcom bears a certain physical resemblance to the British comedy of manners', however, 'a more direct ancestor may be the serialized family comedy adventures that were popular in nineteenth-century American newspapers' [22, 11]. It is of interest that sitcoms are not so action-oriented and are more psychological. Marc compares television to 'the stage upon which our national history/drama is enacted' [22, 12]. Sitcoms provide a continuous entertaining experience in which tensions rising from embarrassment and guilt accompanying characters of the play alleviate with the end of every episode. This genre seems to be an officially approved tool to dissipate social anxiety and discontent with the routine.

Since the 1950s, the laugh track has been an unavoidable feature in sitcoms: it creates the illusion of being present in a theater and looking at the stage. J. Smith assumes that the first show to appear with a laugh track was Hank McClure Show (1950). He explains the expansion of recorded laughter by the 'ideology of presence and immediacy' [23, 36]. The detached from the scene television audience needs social experience. And humor being a tool of in-group association becomes a collective decision when one hears laughter of its other participants. Not surprisingly, stand-up comedy, sketch shows, and other genres borrowed the laugh track. However, Smith argues that by telling the

audience where to laugh the laugh track dominates individual thinking. Nowadays, sitcoms are often shot in front of a live audience to at least partially resist this accusation.

We will now focus on changes that the Internet brought at the end of the twentieth century. It is hard to say whether humor on the Internet has attracted less researchers' attention than humor coming from any other medium. Leah Black and Denise Forro mention Internet sites with humorous content designed as large collections and sites that include 'jokes, cartoons, and stories' [24, 167] as additional content. The authors also attempt to describe kinds of humor that are unacceptable at the workplace: 'Sarcastic or sexual humor, humor used as a "power play" or to challenge authority, humor employed as a means of excluding others, or humor that is used to undermine, belittle, or humiliate an individual.' However, they conclude that 'humor, like justice and fair play, cannot be legislated' [24, 167].

Humor on the Internet often criticizes law, government and politics. For example, Jody C. Baumgartner mentions 'parody or spoof websites posing as candidates' websites, high-quality video shorts produced especially for the web, jokes, cartoons, satire, and parody, targeting both candidates' that emerged around the USA 2004 presidential campaign. The author concludes that due to such humor 'youth might develop a more critical orientation toward political institutions and leaders' [25, 332]; however, the society can benefit from it.

The genres described above (a joke, parody, etc.) were known before the Internet. However, there is a humorous genre that takes root in the Internet communication: a meme. Patrick Davison summarizes definitions of meme from online sources such as Wikipedia, Urban Dictionary, Know Your Meme, and Encyclopedia Dramatica as follows: 'An Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission' [24, 122]. It can be a word or phrase, image (with or without a text), gif, and video, short and catchy. Beside its typical humorous functions to entertain, offend out-groups, etc., Davison studies their intentional anonymity: 'The prioritization of creative freedom over security is epitomized by the non-attribution meme' [24, 132]. That is, the community of meme-creators prefers to keep their freedom to suggest any content ('racist, sexist, or otherwise offensive' [24, 132]) that they would never create in any area ruled by law and government. The price for it is 'no concern for rights management, monetization, citation, or licensing' [24, 132]. This feature outlines, probably, the main difference between the Internet and radio and TV: the humor of official broadcasting companies is a way of making one's living and, hence, it is ordered and supplied in agreed volumes, while the Internet humor is self-expression or lifestyle.

The Internet humor has one more obvious use compared to that of radio and TV. Bill Ellis notes that after national disasters like terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, although at first jokes about the event are undesirable, in a while humor emerges as a coping strategy. However, 'those who communicate such jokes run a social risk in spreading them beyond a trusted circle of acquaintances' [27, 2]. Not surprisingly, when topical disaster jokes are forbidden on radio and TV, they flow into the Internet.

Talking about manipulative power of humor in the Internet, we cannot overlook trolling. This phenomenon is not particularly bound to humor. However, anonymous Internet communication is characterized by a special attitude to rudeness and offense and often includes derision. Scott E. Fahlman, Professor Emeritus of Carnegie Mellon University, writes that already in the early 1980s 'flame wars' were common in the local net: 'The problem was that if someone made a sarcastic remark, a few readers would fail to get the joke, and each of them would post a lengthy diatribe in response' [28]. The inability of some users to read the unseriousness of a message became a ground for a new way of communication. Whitney Phillips tells about a subculture of anonymous users who create forums to discuss, as this Internet expression has it, 'the grossest of the gross' [29, 3]. The most known forum of this kind is, probably, 4chan.org. Trolls can also join against other Internet communities and attack them at other forums. Phillips writes that trolls do it for 'lulz' (a slang word originating from 'laugh out loud'): 'lulz celebrates the anguish of the laughed-at victim' [29, 27]. Trolling is not necessarily bound to forums; cf. the abovementioned political parody. The Internet encyclopedia *LurkMore* (in Russian) uses troll slang and attitudes to describe many social, political, art and mass media phenomena.

In general, use of humor on radio and TV is different from that on the Internet. Official broadcasting companies use humor to entertain and distract their clients, help them reconcile with the social, political and other phenomena that concern as large an audience as possible. To feel more included in the process, the audience is made to hear a laugh track. With the rise of Internet, large collections of jokes attract attention of researchers with their often improper content that cannot be controlled by the law. Harsh disaster jokes forbidden in the official channels flow to the Internet as a coping strategy. Internet humor attacks any political leaders giving no other alternative, but to become indifferent to the politics itself. It is abundant, free of charge and anonymous. Hence, it pushes the limits of rudeness and offense just for the sake of knowing what else can be done to push them even further. And this brings Internet users to creation of a new 'feudal state' where communities ('houses') consolidate and strike up communicative

fighters to compare their verbal power. Next, we will see how two such Russian-speaking communities, 2ch and Pikabu, use humor as manipulative force.

4. Internet Communities 2ch and Pikabu through the Prism of Critical Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics

First, we would like to outline the method we are going to use in our analysis of the Internet communities. It is a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and linguistic pragmatics. The aim of CDA is to describe social cognition via analysis of texts. Earlier we noted that although CDA is an interdisciplinary branch of research it does not simply borrow, but combines meanings of terms from other disciplines [30, 5], pragmatics being among them.

In [31], we suggested that online communities can be observed at three levels of abstraction: as a social group (a general representation of a group's integral features), a cluster (a number of actual users that interact at an actual website, social network, forum, etc.), an individual that identifies himself or herself with one or several social groups. From the point of view of CDA [32], when individuals bring in thoughts that gain support of others, the thoughts become beliefs, values and norms. When shared, they turn into pragmatic assumptions in an actual dialogue conducted by a cluster of individuals, and there is no need to voice them every time when a new thought is verbalized.

What are assumptions in humor as concerns manipulation of public opinion? To answer this question, we will use the method of pragmatics suggested by John Searle in his article *What Is A Speech Act* (1965) [33]. Searle suggests that a speech act is regulated by five rules:

Rule 1. The propositional content rule, including a condition that the parties understand what kind of speech act is uttered.

Rule 2. The attitude towards the speech act.

Rule 3. The content of the action presumed by the act.

Rule 4. The intention rule: whether what is pronounced should be done.

Rule 5. The agonistic rule: the pronounced utterance 'counts as...' [33, 14-15].

We will now consider cases of humor from the most popular topics at Pikabu ('Hot', 'The best') and 2ch ('/b/') to find out where and how individuals and clusters use humor to manipulate opinion of their group. We will call members of these communities 2chers and Pikabushniks as they name themselves so.

Case 1. A Pikabushnik suggests driving out all 2chers from the main thread of 2ch `/b/`: 'Пикабушники, давайте объединимся и изгоним Двачей из 2ch.hk/b?' (<https://2ch.hk/b/arch/2019-05-05/res/195841691.html>) ('Pikabushniks, let us join together and drive out 2chers from 2ch.hk/b?' (Here and further on, the translation of examples is ours.))

At first it seems that, according to Rule 3, the content of the action is stated directly. However, it presupposes an impossible effort and outcome from Pikabu community, as `/b/` is the most popular topic thread at 2ch and serves to integrate the community. Hence, the content of the probable action is different from what is stated. Besides it triggers a series of humorous responses, and we can guess that this is a start of 'comparison of men' *mannjafnaðr*, that, as mentioned earlier, included blaming of disgraceful behavior, feigning contestants' fault, etc. (Rule 5: the actual intent of the speech act). 2chers are taken in and start to mock Pikabushniks. They blame them for the love for likes: 'Пикабучую!' ('You earn my like, Pikabushnik!'), 'Плюсую' ('Like'), 'плюс тебе в карму' ('here's a karma point for you'). 2chers do not have a rating system and often express their pride of it. They also mention professional failures: 'Работает тупорылым тестировщиком. SQL не владеет.' ('Works as a dumb tester. Doesn't know SQL'), sexual disorders and old age: 'куколды сжв 70 годов' ('cuckold Social Justice Warrior of the 70s'), etc. The Pikabu community responds with similar blaming: 'Не работает, гомосексуалист. Языками программирования не владеет.' ('Doesn't work, homosexual. Cannot program.'). 'Я с Пикабу. /...У меня, правда, нет слов. / Убийства животных, истязания людей, мучения... / Пикабушники просто святые по сравнению с вами, хотя и среди нас самих много дебилов.' ('I'm from Pikabu. / ...I'm speechless. / Kill animals, torture people, suffering... / Pikabushniks are saints compared to you, although there are some dummies among us as well.'). (Comparison of 2chers and Pikabushniks also often mentions Pikabushniks' tendency to write long original posts and comments: 'Пикабушник может сочинить целую простыню с оригинальным сюжетом, даун-оп не может придумать название из одного слова' ('A Pikabushnik can write a whole sheet with an original plot. A loony author cannot think of a post title longer than a word') <https://2ch.hk/b/arch/2017-11-21/res/165435979.html>) It is of interest that programming is one of the virtues that is worthy of respect in the both communities.

Case 2. During the fire at the shopping center 'Zimnaya vishnya' (Kemerovo, Russia) the both communities produced disaster jokes.

The mentioned ability of humor to help to reconcile with a tragedy when humor is inappropriate in formal channels shows in polylogues of the both studied communities.

It is notable that this humor demonstrates a social intent. A 2cher writes: 'Трупов нет! это все 5D' ('There are no corpses! It's 5D') as a response to the news that there were no casualties at the shopping center. The outwardly expressed intention of this speech act is to prove that the official version of events is truthful, to protect the government by suggesting that the dramatic events were a result of an illusion at the center's cinema. However, as the proposed proof is obviously too exaggerated, we can suppose that the underlying intent is quite the opposite: to criticize the government. There are jokes of a similar type at Pikabu. In response to urgent fire checks in Russian shopping malls after the tragedy in 'Zimnaya vishnya', a Pikabushnik writes: 'Люблю есть сладкую вату в ТЦ, а он закрылся на проверку, и теперь я должен есть ее на улице. Спасибо, Зимняя вишня.' ('I love cotton candies in malls, but due to fire checks I have to eat it in the street today. Thank you, Zimnaya vishnya.') (https://pikabu.ru/story/kakie_uroki_chinovniki_izvlekayut_iz_zimney_vishni_ili_kak_zastavit_chinovnikov_rabotat_5849315#comments).

However, the difference in anonymity policy shows in the disaster humor, as well. 2chers allow non-social humor (more like trolling), for the sake of lulz. The humorous remark of a 2cher 'ПОДДАЙТЕ ГАЗКУ' (<https://2ch.hk/b/arch/2018-03-26/res/173169810.html>) ('ADD MORE GAS') utters the want for more deaths. There was even a whole series of such jokes about one of the 2ch moderators known as Abu. The 2chers pronounced him dead in the fire, then created a story how he heroically saved people from the fire, then pronounced him alive, which is an obvious parallel with the Pope of Fools and what Bakhtin and Kristeva describe as a carnival, celebrating the triumph of life above death.

Case 3. 'The grossest of the gross': a 2cher asked what to do, when his 2-year old niece left in his care fell and hit her forehead (<https://2ch.hk/b/arch/2018-12-08/res/187762913.html>).

Asking for advice presupposes that communicants return instructions. Among the answers to Case 3 there were actual tips like 'call the ambulance', but there were also a lot of humorous remarks with the obvious violation of pragmatic Rule 4: 'Попробуй сильно дунуть в ухо, что бы вмятина выправилась' ('Try blowing hard in her ear to straighten the skull'), 'Попробуй легкими ударами (только ЛЕГКИМИ) выровнять вмятину.' ('Try to straighten it with light (LIGHT) taps.'), 'Надо присоской, если нет -- то вантузом выпрямить ее. Вмятины у машин так выпрямляют' ('Use a suction tool. If you don't have it, use a plunger. They repair dents with it'), etc. Unlike Pikabu, the anonymous 2ch community, when they start to troll somebody, tends to go to extremes, reaching the limits of what the human thought (and the society's norm) allows. The

thread continued with ingenious ideas of a murder and covering up the crime. On the one hand, this is not a `comparison of men' now, as there is no obvious competitor in the vicinity, but a training before the actual verbal fight: some of the brought-in thoughts are used later in other comparisons. On the other hand, the participants of the community compare among themselves and test their ability of how far they can go. After a variety of 2ch polylogues, the reader notices that, although with a bit of variation, the community goes over a list of similar vices, which finally seems burdensome.

Case 4. A Pikabushnik reflects on who Pikabushniks are:

Пикабушники -- это люди, которые готовы помочь человеку и дать дельные советы, если он действительно нуждается в помощи, но готовые с удовольствием и злорадством утопить тебя в минусах, если ты просишь их о какой-то ерунде... / Пикабушники -- это братья. это семья. со своими законами и правилами.' (https://pikabu.ru/story/kto_takie_pikabushniki_3250675)

(Pikabushniks are people ready to help someone and give useful advice if he or she truly needs help, but they are also ready to down-vote your post with malicious joy and pleasure if you ask them for a trifle... / Pikabushniks are brothers. it's a family. with its own rules and laws.)

Posts and separate comments with reflection on community's identity appear in 2ch and Pikabu quite often, and, as often, they contain humor. The post in Case 4 was not very popular as concerns likes and comments, but it contains the characteristic features that let us call it what we earlier called a wise man's laughter. Again, a wise man stands above himself or herself and the crowd and laughs and immediately weeps about what he or she sees. His or her laughter `counts as' (pragmatic Rule 5) unveiling this ambiguity.

It is of interest that down-voting is mentioned as a community's vice. In another post, a Pikabushnik suggests that the site moderators should ban users who only down-vote others' posts: `Запретить только минусовать' (https://pikabu.ru/story/zapretit_tolko_minusovat_6675818) ('Forbid to only down-vote') and gets -63 for the post. This time the speech act itself followed the rules of an actual suggestion and call to action. However, the intent failed and the sub-community of Pikabu, who call themselves `League of Evil' (they down-vote all posts they see), consolidated and answered not only with down-voting and direct disapproval, but with humorous remarks. Consider, for example, the following exaggeration: `User 1: Кажется, автор хочет устроить геноцид Рыцарям Свежера' ('User 1: It seems that the author wants to commit genocide on the Knights of the Fresh'), as well as inversion: `Правильно, надо их пряниками накормить, они раздобрееут и начнут плюсы ставить.' (Right, give them tarts, they will grow fat and

kind and start up-voting.) Hence, in large Internet communities, it is not always an out-group that starts a feud, but it can be a sub-community.

2chers also reflect on their community in this way. They even have inside-the-community slang terms they use to underline drawbacks of the community's typical representatives:

1. 'Хикка' (from Japanese 引きこもり Hikikomori) (<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23182523>) refers to young men who prefer to stay at home, do not have career aspirations or start a family;
2. 'ТНН' means 'Girls are unnecessary' and refers to young men who cannot start a relationship with a girl;
3. 'Бугурт' originated from 'butthurt' and denotes a painful emotional reaction to news, a commentary, etc.

However, as long posts are not so common at 2ch, this self-reflection looks more like a patchwork of isolated short jokes.

5. Conclusion

Our analysis of the pragmatic rules shows that, as concerns social cognition, the modern online communities use humor for similar manipulative purposes: to consolidate and fight against their competitors, to reflect on their identity and community's norms and values.

According to Nick Couldry and James Curran, the media power can be of two types. The first one is the power of groups that have access to media. From this perspective, the media do not have power of their own. The second approach implies that 'the media is an emergent form of social power in complex societies whose basic infrastructure depends increasingly on the fast circulation of information and images' [34, 4]. From this point of view, humor transmitted through the Internet excites different nodes and connections: not only the target and the audience, but, for example, such institutions as court, government, corporations, church, minorities, parents' committees, etc. This process brings up different kinds of enforcement: moral, political, economic, and legal. As if opposed to *Rechtsstaat*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls Internet communication 'amorphous, anarchic and intensely social' [35, 21]: the informal bare humor is excluded from the legal state. Instead, the Internet community falls back in history and creates a state of its own.

Our analysis of the social nature of humor in the Internet shows that the two rivaling communities, 2ch and Pikabu, repeat the traditional practices of old: *senna* and *man-njafnadr*, carnival, a wise estrangement, although the forms they use (memes, comments and posts, image boards, hashtags) are technologically new. The manipulative technique is based on the pragmatic rules that are violated so that they produce a humorous effect. Hence, pragmatic rules (*Pragmatikstaat*) serve as laws, their violation as an invitation to a verbal feud, community names and slang as differentiation markers between the sides.

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